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"Environmental Egalitarianism and 'Who Do You Save' Dilemmas"

Michael, Mark A.,

Michael, Mark A. "Environmental Egalitarianism and 'Who Do You Save' Dilemmas." *Environmental Values* 6, no. 3 (1997): 307–25. doi:10.3197/096327197776679112 .

Some critics have understood environmental egalitarianism to imply that human and animal lives are generally equal in value, so that killing a human is no more objectionable than killing a dog. This charge should be troubling for anyone with egalitarian sympathies. I argue that one can distinguish two distinct versions of equality, one based on the idea of equal treatment, the other on the idea of equally valuable lives. I look at a lifeboat case where one must choose between saving a human and saving a dog, and using the work of Peter Singer and Tom Regan, I show why equality understood as equal treatment does not entail that lifeboat cases are moral toss-ups. But the view that all lives are equally valuable does entail this, and so egalitarians should reject this alternative account of equality. The upshot is that egalitarians need to be more careful about distinguishing between these two versions of equality. The failure to insist on this distinction has led many to believe that egalitarianism generally has counter-intuitive implications when in fact only one version of egalitarianism has this problem.

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